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Phan Bội Châu and Japan

by

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I Key Factors to be Analyzed

It was during or after the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905, that some Vietnamese nationalists, including Phan Bội Châu, came to Japan. The reason they came to Japan has been interpreted by Japanese scholars as the result of Japanese influence upon them.¹⁾

However, few scholars have made a concrete or close analysis²⁾ of the reasons why

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- 1) In Phan Bội Châu's case, see; Heiji Nakamura, "Indo-Tonan Ajia niokeru Minzoku-undo" in *Sekai-rekishi* 23, Iwanami, ("Nationalism in India and Southeast Asia" in *World History* vol. 23) pp. 117-118. And Yoshihiko Tanigawa, *Tonan-Ajia Minzoku-kaiho Undo-shi*. (*History of Southeast Asian Nationalist Movement*, Keiso-shobo, Tokyo, 1969), pp. 47-49.
- 2) There are two written theories discussing Phan Bội Châu's trip to Japan.

One is David Marr's *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Univ. of California, 1971). This book, using full Vietnamese documents and other books, draws a map of Vietnamese anti-French movements up until 1925, and it gives us many useful suggestions. On page 106, the author suggests two reasons that brought Phan Bội Châu to Japan: "First, because the Japanese were the same race as the Vietnamese and second, because their reform effort had enabled them to defeat China and... was giving them amazing strength against the Russians."

I agree with his suggestions, but his reasoning is not completely persuasive. Because (1) it has not clearly answered the questions as to why Phan Bội Châu did not rely upon his own people but instead dared to ask for foreign help and (2) it does not clearly tell us what had influenced him to come to Japan even though he knew Japan was the country that had annexed the Ryukyus.

The second study about Phan Bội Châu's trip to Japan is Kunie Kawamoto's "Phan Bội Châu no Nihon-kan" (Phan Bội Châu's impressions of Japan) in *Rekishigaku-kenkyu*, no. 391. In his article Kawamoto makes two important points. First it was before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War that Phan Bội Châu's group became interested in Japan. Second it was contradictory that Phan Bội Châu went to Japan though he was conscious of Japan's aggressiveness (like France's) and its annexation of the Ryukyus.

Kawamoto's suggestions are very important and interesting. As for the first point, he attributes Phan Bội Châu's interest in Japan mainly to the influence of Tăng Bạt Hổ, who had visited China and was an old friend of Nguyễn Thành. But Phan Bội Châu wrote his article on the Ryukyus as early as 1903, while he met Tăng Bạt Hổ in late 1904. So there must be another source for Phan Bội Châu's knowledge about Japan and the subjugated Ryukyus.

As for Kawamoto's second argument, he states that although Phan Bội Châu was aware of Japan's aggressiveness, he was fascinated by its strength rather than being afraid of it. The author almost says that Phan Bội Châu seems to have gone to Japan rather reluctantly. But in the beginning of the 20th century, not only Phan Bội Châu, but many other Vietnamese did not hesitate to express their admiration for Japan's strength and its continued existence in a hostile world. Thus we need another hypothesis to resolve the above-mentioned "contradiction."

Japan was chosen by the Vietnamese nationalists as the most suitable place for a new movement.

Phan Bội Châu was one of a group of the prominent intellectuals who had a traditional academic background, but they were also influenced by the new thoughts from China at the turn of this century. He was a leader of the Đông Du (東遊) movement, or "Visit the East" movement of 1905 to 1908. Even after this period, his appeal to renovate the country encouraged many youths to engage in revolutionary activities. It was not until 1925 that his political career was over.

Some of the influence of the Đông Du movement was alive even in the 1940's, in the form of the Pro-Japanese nationalist movement during the era of Japanese occupation. This continuity is demonstrated by such figures as Prince Cường Để who was among the most important participants in the Đông Du movement and who also played a key role in the 1940's movement.

Thus it is important as well as interesting to analyze why Phan Bội Châu's group chose Japan and what its experiences in Japan were.

It appears there are three key factors ought to be analyzed in order to answer the preceding questions:

(1) All the Vietnamese Confucianist lettrés born in the middle of the nineteenth century were deeply affected by the thoughts of contemporary Chinese scholars such as K'ang Yu Wei (黃有為), Liang Ch'i Ch'ao (梁啓超), and later, Chang Ping Lin (章炳麟) and Sun Wen (孫文).

(2) Behind their ideas, especially those of Phan Bội Châu, are calculative and utilitarian elements. However, Phan Bội Châu and his group's considerations were vulnerable to Japanese considerations of power politics.

(3) There was a large gap between their vision, which they nourished before their departure for Japan, and the actuality that they confronted in Japan.

II Beginning of Phan's Interest in Japan

Nguyễn Lộ Trạch, author of "Thiên Hạ Đại Thế Luận" (天下大勢論, *On the General Situation of the World*)³⁾ and one of the famous intellectuals who preceded Phan Bội Châu's generation, paid great attention to Japan which he saw as an innovative and developing Asian country. Phan Bội Châu himself expressed the same opinion in his "Lưu Cầu Huyêt Lê Tân Thư" (琉球血淚新書, *New Letter with Blood and Tears on Ryukyu*). Nguyễn Lộ Trạch's appeal was written in 1892 and Phan Bội Châu's was in 1903. Thus even before the Russo-Japanese War broke out, Vietnamese scholars

3) Nguyễn Văn Xuân, *Phong Trào Duy Tân*, (Lá Bối, Saigon, 1970), pp. 28-35, referred this article. The other articles of Nguyễn Lộ Trạch are summarized in Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, *Nguyễn Lộ Trạch*, (Anh Minh, Huế, 1966).

had been interested in the rise of a new great power in the Far East. And according to his autobiography, Phan Bội Châu had read Nguyễn Lộ Trạch's manuscript, which seemingly informed Phan of Japanese success in development, before he wrote "Lưu Cầu Huyêt Lê Tân Thư."⁴

How did Nguyễn Lộ Trạch and Phan Bội Châu gain this knowledge about Japan? We can suppose that the Chinese books were their main sources of information. Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, one of the Confucianists of Phan Bội Châu's period, wrote in his autobiography that a book titled "Nhật Bản Duy Tân Sử" (日本維新史, *History of Japan's Innovation*) came from their northern neighbour along with other reformists' books.⁵

Furthermore, the Chinese reform movement itself was strongly affected by the reforms enacted during Meiji Restoration. Especially motivated by the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese reformists took the Japanese constitutional monarchy as their model and organized a movement to send youths to Japan, and translate Japanese books while engaging in other reformist activities.⁶ It is natural to think that the Vietnamese, like the Chinese, would be interested in Japan.

Because of Phan Bội Châu's emphasis on the Russo-Japanese War in his autobiography,⁷ we tend to think, wrongly, that Vietnamese nationalists became interested in Japan shortly after the outbreak of war. But as mentioned above, this does not seem to be the case. We should recognize that Phan Bội Châu and his comrades were concerned with Japan well before that war, even though Japan's war with Russia accelerated Vietnamese interest in Japan.

In brief it is through the Chinese reformists' writings that the Vietnamese lettrés' attention was first directed to Japan. The Chinese reformists sought a clue to break the deadlock which they were facing, and so they turned to Japan as a model. The

4) Phan Bội Châu, *Tự Phán*, (Anh Minh, 1956), pp. 34-35.

5) Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, *Tự Truyện*, (Anh Minh, 1963), p. 26. Furthermore, Nguyễn Hiền Lê, *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thực*, (Lá Bối, 1968), p. 27, counted three books; Nhật Bản Duy Tân Kháng Khái Sử (Outline History of Japanese Innovation), Nhật Bản Tam Thập Niên Duy Tân Sử (30-year History of Japanese Innovation), and Nhật Bản Quốc Sử (History of Japan).

6) I referred to the following books;

Hidemi Onogawa, *Shinmatsu Seiji-shiso Kenkyu*, (*Studies in Political Thoughts of Later ch'ing*, Kyoto Univ., 1960). Jun Takada, *Chugoku no Kindai to Jukyo*, (*Modernization and Confucianism in China*, Kinokuniya, Tokyo). Masataka Banno, *Kindai Chugoku Seiji Gaiko Shi*, (*History of Politics and Diplomacy in Modern China*, Univ. of Tokyo, 1973).

7) In his *Ngục Trung Thư*, (Tân Việt, Saigon, 1950), p. 28, Phan Bội Châu said, "The Russo-Japanese war showed us a truly new world. Our people only knew China before the French occupation, and after it, we only knew France. We never considered the changes and trends of the world. Our movement was for a long time only motivated by a spirit of self-sacrifice and thoughts of revenge. We did not have any concrete vision of national independence. Only after we left our country and went abroad could we thoroughly alter our thoughts and knowledge. We are greatly indebted to the Russo-Japanese War for this."

Vietnamese were confronted with almost the same difficulty. They naturally followed the same path as the Chinese. It is very significant that when Phan Bội Châu came to Japan, he went first to meet Liang Ch'i Ch'ao, the great Chinese reformer who was spending a life of exile in Yokohama. It is through him that Phan Bội Châu gradually became acquainted with a number of Japanese politicians.⁸⁾

III Reasons for Phan's Visit to Japan

In this section I will try to examine the reasons why the Vietnamese, especially Phan Bội Châu, went to Japan and why he and his comrades "left their ancestors' tombs, parted with their wives and children, crossed the ocean, and went to the country with which they have not been familiar for these thousands of years."⁹⁾

There are at least three main reasons which brought them to Japan. These are (1) Social Darwinism, (2) their desire to persist in armed struggle by seeking foreign aid, and (3) their simplistic conception of the solidarity among the yellow peoples against the whites.

1 Social Darwinism

Social Darwinism has seldom been considered of importance by the scholars of Vietnamese history. But in fact many of the documents of the period testify Vietnamese acceptance of Social Darwinism.¹⁰⁾

In a poem titled "Địa Lý" (Geography) popularized by the school of Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục, (東京義塾) we find the following passage:

Five Continents in the world.
The first, the Continent of Asia.
The second that of America.
And then Europe, Australia and Africa.
The Races are clearly divided
According to the Continents.
The Yellow and the White
Are strong and wise.
The Black, the Red and the Blue

8) As for Phan Bội Châu's activities in Japan, please see; Phan Bội Châu, *Ngục Trung Thu'*, pp. 33-58. Phan Bội Châu, *Tự Phán*, pp. 51-128. Yoshihisa Kuzuu, *Toa Sengaku Shishi Kiden*, (*Biography of pioneer Patriots in East Asia*), Kokuryu Kai, Tokyo, 1935, pp. 816-825. Shinjiro Nagaoka, "Nihon ni okeru Vietnam no hitobito" (Vietnamese in Japan), in *Vietnam Bokoku shi*, *hoka*, (Heibon-sha, Tokyo, 1966).

9) Phan Chu Trinh, "Bức Thư Gửi Chính Phủ Pháp, "in Thê Nguyên, *Phan Chu Trinh*, (Tân Việt, 1956), p. 89, or in Thái Bạch, *Thi Văn Quốc Cầm Thơ'i Thuộc Pháp*, (Khai Trí, Saigon, 1968), p. 356.

10) David Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 100, mentions it.

Are stupid and silly.
All of life is a struggle.
The wise race will survive,
The stupid will perish.
Lạc Hồng was the Ancestor
Of our Country.
And our Mountains and Rivers (our Country)
Have been called Đại Nam
For 4000 years.
The Subjects of our King
Number 40 million.¹¹⁾

The poem is strongly influenced by the idea of Social Darwinism. And it seems to imitate terminology and the ideas of Liang Ch'i Ch'ao, especially those of the "Hsin-min-shuo" (新民說, *Theory on New Citizen*)¹²⁾. It was surely Chinese books that introduced the theory of Social Darwinism to Vietnamese scholars. This is demonstrated by the fact that the terms used by the Vietnamese are still the same as those used by the Chinese. (For example, the term of Thiên diễn (天演), or evolution of the univers).¹³⁾ Besides, it was very natural and reasonable that the Vietnamese lettrés at the beginning of the 20th century, who experienced their country's shameful defeat by the French, smoothly accepted the theory of Social Darwinism as a universal rule of this world. They accepted it even though their knowledge and understanding of the theory were incomplete.

It is very interesting that not only the group of Phan Bội Châu, but the nationalist lettrés who were opposed to their martial idea, were also deeply affected by Social Darwinism.¹⁴⁾ In 1905, Huynh Thúc Kháng and Trần Quý Cáp jointly wrote a Chinese-style classic poem titled "Danh Sơn Lương Ngọc" (名山良玉). This passage says:

Our country of Việt was originally founded

11) Nguyễn Hiền Lê, *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thực*, p. 71.

12) Liang Ch'i Ch'ao, "Hsin-Min Shuo," in *Hsin-min Ts'ung-pao*, no. 2, Feb. 1902.

13) The Vietnamese way of saying Western names symbolically proves that the Vietnamese had their first contacts with Western culture and thoughts through Chinese books. For example, the Vietnamese called Bismarck, Tỉ Tư Mạck; Gladstone, Cách Lan Tư Đôn; and Washington, Hoa Thịnh Đôn (Nguyễn Hiền Lê, op. cit., p. 69). Those names were borrowed from the Chinese characters into which the Chinese scholars had transcribed Westerners' names according to their own way of pronunciation. When the Vietnamese imported the names, they automatically used the characters that the Chinese scholars had transcribed. However, because the Vietnamese Pronunciation of these characters is differed, the Vietnamese pronunciation of Westerners' names was further corrupted.

14) Phan Chu Trinh wrote a "Letter to the Governor General of Indochina," (1906), in which he mentioned "this society where the strong gains and the weak loses." (In Thái Bạch, op. cit., p. 351, or in *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử* no. 66, p. 9) And Trần Quý Cáp said, "Now on the earth, big countries are struggling and developing knowledge. Thus they have become rich and strong." (Nguyễn Văn Xuân, op. cit., p. 177)

In a part of East Asia.
 Back in the time of Hồng Bàng
 Lately in the ages of the Trần and Lý dynasties,
 Our people were pure and brave.
 We beat the Army of Tô Định
 At Lĩnh Biều,¹⁵⁾
 And defeated Mã Nhi
 In the battle of Phú Lương.¹⁶⁾
 We also overthrew the Chiêm Thành¹⁷⁾
 In fighting,
 And destroyed the Chân Lạp¹⁸⁾
 With weapons.
 How strong and prosperous
 Our country was!
 How could we be inferior
 To other countries?
 However, one failure caused us to regret
 For ten thousand years.¹⁹⁾

This poem shows us that on the one hand they described the old prosperous Vietnam as a country which had successfully resisted all the aggressors, like the Tô Định or Mã Nhi, from China, and on the other hand as a strong conqueror of the southern minorities, like Chiêm Thành and Chân Lạp. According to them, the fact that the Vietnamese destroyed and absorbed the other weaker races was not a blot but a brilliant achievement upon their history.²⁰⁾

It is well known that Phan Bội Châu wrote the pamphlet “Lưu Cầu Huyết Lệ Tân Thu” in which he discussed the fate of the Ryukyus or Okinawa. Unfortunately this pamphlet has been lost.²¹⁾ According to his memoir, in that pamphlet he showed his pity for the Ryukyus, which had been deprived of their territorial rights and sovereignty by Japan.²²⁾ Therefore it is clear that Phan Bội Châu knew that Japan had annexed the Ryukyus. However it is strange that he did not seem to identify his country with the Ryukyus (or at least he did not want to do so). Even though he

15) This refers to the story of the Trưng sisters who resisted the army of Han dynasty in the 1st century.

16) This refers to the battle of Bạch Đằng where the Vietnamese defeated the mongolian troops.

17) Chiêm Thành was Cham or Champa, who built the kingdom in central Vietnam.

18) Chân Lạp was an old kingdom of Khmers.

19) This poem is in Nguyễn Quyết Thắng, *Huỳnh Thúc Kháng*, (Phụ Quốc Vụ Khanh Đặc Trách Văn Hóa, Saigon, 1972), pp. 353–358.

20) See note 26).

21) Some of this article was printed in the magazine *Văn Sử Địa*, no. 33, pp. 68–73.

22) Phan Bội Châu, *Tự Phán*, pp. 34–35.

felt pity for the subjugated Ryukyus, it seems that the intention of his writing was not to appeal for solidarity with the subjugated people nor to denounce Japan as an aggressor, similar to France which had occupied his fatherland. Contrary to our expectation, he refused to identify the fortune of his country with that of the Ryukyus. Instead he oriented himself to the conqueror, Japan.²³⁾

We can comprehend his way of thinking by analyzing the influence Social Darwinism had on him. His intention was that Vietnam should avoid the same fate as the Ryukyus, a 'stupid' and 'weak' race. He hoped his country would become stronger by following the model of wise and prosperous Japan. In a sense he can be seen as an intellectual grandson of Darwin, Spencer and Huxley. He was their grandson, of course, because he became aware of their ideas through the Chinese reformers' writings. In 1905 on his way to Japan, in his letter to the Governor of Canton, he said, "the Era when the strong eats the weak's flesh."²⁴⁾

And in his "Tân Việt Nam" (新越南, New Vietnam), written in 1907, Phan Bội Châu's belief in Social Darwinism is expressed more clearly. In that article he depicted the independent and powerful Vietnam which he longed for.

"We will hold all the rights of home administration and foreign relations. The work of civilising our country will advance day by day and our sphere of influence will be expanded everyday. We will have a strong army of 3 million, like a tiger glaring in all directions, and a brave navy like a whale watching all the ocean. After that, we will send ambassadors to all countries. Every country in the European and American continents, Japan, the United States, Germany and England will be connected with our country and will regard us as an allied nation of the first class. Siam, India, and Indonesia will look upon us as the chief of their league, and China, a great country in Asia, will consider us as a close and fraternal country. Our adversary, France, will be afraid of us, will obey our words and will come to ask for our protection. Our

23) As for Vietnam's wish to identify itself with Japan, it is useful to recall one episode relating to **Tăng Bạt Hổ**. According to **Nguyễn Hiền Lã**, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-31, **Tăng Bạt Hổ**, who became a sailor in China and who sailed to Japan several times, soon mastered the Japanese language and enlisted in the Japanese Navy. During the Russo-Japanese War, he distinguished himself on the battlefield. His bravery elicited the admiration of the Japanese and he was decorated. After his triumph, he attended a banquet held by the Emperor Meiji, where he appealed to the Emperor with tears about the pitiful conditions of his own country. Listening to his words, the Emperor Meiji praised his patriotism and consoled him. Taking this opportunity, according to **Nguyễn Hiền Lã**'s words, he became acquainted with Tsuyoshi Inukai and Shigenobu Okuma and others. He was advised by them to send Vietnamese students to Japan. This episode is not really verifiable. It is remarkable that this legend seems to have been eagerly accepted and widely believed by a number of Vietnamese. In fact, the originator of the story was just telling his own dream. He dreamed of one Vietnamese who helped strong yellow Japanese people defeated the white Russians and thus inspired his own people to identify with the Japanese. The same type of episode was narrated in **Phước Hữu's** *Phong Trào Đại Đông Du*, (Nam Việt, Saigon, 1950), pp. 7-9.

24) *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử* no. 90, p. 62.

flags will stream in Paris, the colour of our country will brighten all the world. In these days, we will have no need to fear our slavery any more, and we will have only to watch and protect the other countries.²⁵⁾

In this passage Phan Bội Châu testified the hope that his country would escape from the present weakness, join the strongest nations of Europe, America and the Far East, and become the chief of a Southeast Asian league and the protector of France. In order to transform the weak into the strong, it would be necessary to follow the Japanese example. The Japanese had been successfully strengthening themselves for the past forty years.²⁶⁾

This article was written in 1907, two years after Phan Bội Châu left his country for Japan, but he must have nourished the same expectation before he left for Japan.

Thus it was Social Darwinism that led him and his comrades to be interested in a strong Japan, and not in the other weak nations.

2 The Desire for Armed Struggle through Foreign Aid

The most prominent element which Phan Bội Châu carried over from his predecessors, the leaders of Văn Thân - Cần Vương movement, was the idea of resistance by force. He was strongly impressed with the bravery and heroism of the armed struggle against the French during the 1880's.²⁷⁾ And he expressed his willingness to join this struggle by attempting to organize a small band of guerrillas in 1885.²⁸⁾

After the heroic movement of Phan Đình Phùng was completely defeated, Phan Bội Châu nourished his admiration for the Văn Thân - Cần Vương movement, although he was compelled to live quietly in his home village for more than 10 years. As late as 1901 he decided to carry out his plan for seizing by force the provincial capital in Nghệ An. He and his comrades planned the insurrection hoping to mobilize like-minded individuals and revive anti-French armed resistance which had faded after the death of Phan Đình Phùng.²⁹⁾ Of course it was inevitable that their plot failed like the revolts of lettrés in the 19th century. Yet it is noteworthy that he started his career as a politician and a nationalist by attempting to organize an armed revolt. Thus he

25) *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử*, no. 78, p. 32.

26) In this context, we can compare Liang Ch'i Ch'ao's words which he described in *Jih-pen-kuo-shi Hou-hsu* (日本国志後序, 1897): "During 30 years, Japan turned misfortune into happiness, and changed herself from the weak into the strong. Thus she got the Ryukyus and she annexed Taiwan."

27) In 1883, at an age of 16 years, Phan Bội Châu wrote an appeal "Bình Tây Thu Bắc", on the occasion of the French attack on North Vietnam. After his failure in organizing small band (1885), he also wrote a pamphlet "Song Tuất Lục" in 1886, in which he praised two revolts which occurred in 1874 and 1886. His admiration for the Văn Thân - Cần Vương movement was testified to in his *Việt Nam Vong Quốc Sử* (Tao Đàn, Saigon), originally written in 1905. In it he described the martial exploits of the nineteenth century leaders.

28) Phan Bội Châu, *Ngục Trung Thư*, pp. 13-14.

29) *Ibid.*, pp. 15-33. Phan Bội Châu, *Tự Phán*, pp. 26 ff. and Thè Nguyên, *Phan Bội Châu*, (Tân Việt, 1956), pp. 13-22.

inherited the fighting spirit of his predecessors. He also inherited the 1000-year tradition of resistance against aggressors.³⁰⁾

But in spite of their willingness for armed struggle, Phan Bội Châu and his comrades, as well as their predecessors, were realistic enough to recognize that they were militarily inferior to the enemy, the French.³¹⁾ How did they understand their inferiority? Like the brilliant nationalists in the 19th century, Phan Bội Châu's group felt this deficiency stemmed mainly from a lack of weapons. It is natural that those who believed in armed struggle as the only way to resolve their problems were concerned about a sufficient supply of arms. But they fully realized that they could not get enough weapons within Vietnam to fight the French.

Phan Bội Châu said in his memoir:

“(At the time of our ancestors’ resistance against the Chinese aggressors), once we grasped the weapons and appealed to the whole country, big waves soundly surged. However, today the situation is not as it was. With the invention of guns, the spear and sword are of no use any more. We can do nothing at all, even with our individual bravery. The weapons of the French are one thousand times better than ours. . . . In brief, the biggest difficulty thwarting the plan of our party is none other than that of weapons.”³²⁾

Writing about this difficulty more concretely, he said:

“All the arsenals in our country are occupied by French troops. If we become interested in guns, we will be severely punished. . . . Although we want to import arms from abroad, it is impossible because all the ports in our country are closely watched by French officials.”³³⁾

It was not only Phan Bội Châu and his comrades, but also his predecessors who realized they were inferior to the French and lacked the means to resist them. Therefore they tried to resolve this difficulty by seeking foreign aid. Some leaders of the Văn Thân – Cần Vương movement sent delegates or went themselves to China for that purpose.³⁴⁾ Phan Bội Châu's group approached Japan for the same reason.

30) For example, Phan Bội Châu wrote in “Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư” (Japanese translation in *Vietnam Bokoku-shi, hoka*), “We had defeated the Mongolian troops, checked the invasion of Ngo, and shattered the army of Ch’ing. I can not understand why our people have lost their traditional nationalist spirits.”

31) We can find the following passage in the appeal of Nguyễn Quang Bích, one of the leaders of revolts of the 19th century. “As long as you boast about your strength, your skills, we will continue to refuse to give up our failures, our weaknesses.” See David Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 71. and Truong Bun Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention*, (Yale Univ., 1967), p. 130.

32) Phan Bội Châu, *Ngục Trung Thư*, pp. 26–27.

33) *Ibid.*, p. 27.

34) It is well known that Tôn Thất Thuyết, the most important adviser for King Hàm Nghi, went to China in order to ask her help. So did other leaders, such as Nguyễn Quang Bích, Nguyễn Thiện Thuật.

Thus it was military aid, especially in the form of weapons, that Phan Bội Châu sought first after his arrival in Japan.

At this point we should note that Phan Bội Châu did not look for aid from countries with absolute monarchies, like China, but from a country with a constitutional monarchy, Japan. This shift of focus was stimulated by the Chinese reformists' disappointment with contemporary China and their preference for Japan and for constitutionalism. Later it was also stimulated by the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. In brief, this change showed the coming of a new age in the history of Vietnamese nationalism. Though Phan Bội Châu and his comrades owed a great deal to the nationalist movements which preceded them, they also had to arm themselves with new ideas and visions which fulfilled the requirements of the times.

3 The Yellow race vs. the Whites

Soon after he arrived in Japan, Phan Bội Châu wrote a letter to Shigenobu Okuma (大隈重信) (1905). In this letter, he insisted that Japan should help Vietnam, which was occupied by the French. And he listed two reasons for his appeal to Japan. The first was that the Great Empire of Japan was a country of the same race, the same characters, and the same continent as Vietnam, and she was a leading power in Asia. The second reason was that the French, aiming at Southern China, surely would conspire with the Russians, aiming at Northern China, and then would move from their base in Vietnam to Canton, Kwangsi, Taiwan, and the Ryukyus. Then they would pose a great threat to Japan.³⁵⁾

The first reason was phrased in terms of a Japanese duty to rescue the Vietnamese. And the second appealed to Japanese interests in maintaining her sphere of influence.³⁶⁾ Here Phan Bội Châu connected the idea of solidarity among the yellow peoples against the whites, with the reality of power politics in the international field.

Perhaps he was truly convinced of this kind of solidarity. But behind it, he also had an ulterior motive for advocating Pan-Asianism. At the time of the Russo-Japanese War, the French were in alliance with the Russians. He may have heard of the Triple Intervention and the Russo-French alliance. So Phan Bội Châu's group drew a map of the international power configuration in Asia. They knew that Japan was opposing Russia, and thought that therefore Japan was also opposing France. Of course, the French were an adversary of the Vietnamese. According to Phan Bội Châu, Japan and

35) 36) "Hai Văn Kiện Ngoại Giao Đầu Tiên của Phan Bội Châu," translated by Chương Thâu in *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử*, no. 90.

We do not know enough to determine whether this argument thoroughly formulated before his arrival in Japan or if it was shaped and influenced by the Japanese Pan-Asianists' and/or Liang Ch'i Ch'ao's opinions after his arrival.

Vietnam thus had common enemies, Russia and France.³⁷⁾ This is why he believed that the Vietnamese could be allied with the Japanese.

In one sense Phan Bội Châu's expectation of foreign aid was based on his understanding of international relations. Throughout his life, he continued to seek help from every country that seemed to be opposed to France. At first it was Japan, and later it was Germany and nationalist China, and finally it was Soviet Russia. Frequently he changed his political ideas in order to comply with the desires of his possible patronage countries. As long as he sought the aid of Imperial Japan, he was a Pan-Asianist and a Constitutional Monarchist. When he tried to ally with republican China, he was a revolutionist and a republican democrat. And later he seemed to sympathize with socialism when he tried to contact the Soviet embassy in Peking. In his life, he had only one goal. This was to drive the French out of his country and rebuild an independent nation.³⁸⁾ For this goal, he could easily accept any idea which would assure him of foreign aid.³⁹⁾

In conclusion, at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, in the eyes of Phan Bội Châu the cause of Pan-Asianism and the interest of Japan and Vietnam in the field of power politics were consistent and harmonious with one another. By declaring the solidarity of the yellow race against the whites, Phan Bội Châu expressed his hope for solidarity between Japan and Vietnam against Russia and France.

IV Phan's Illusions

Believers in Social Darwinism, Phan Bội Châu and his comrades refused to remain

- 37) Nguyễn Thức Canh (or Trần Trọng Khắc), one of Phan Bội Châu's followers who went to Japan, wrote in his memoir, *Năm Mươi Bốn Năm Hải Ngoại*, (1971), pp.13-14, "(Hearing about the result of Russo-Japanese War), the French were disappointed, while we Vietnamese were delighted, because Japan, an Asian country of the yellow race, had triumphed over a European country of the white, Russia, and because this defeated country was allied with the French colonialists."
- 38) In this context it would perhaps prove useful to cite the following remarks which he made, "Our aim was only to restore our country and to establish an independent government. We had no other idea yet than that." (*Tự Phán*, p. 29) or, "The aim of our party was one and only; to drive out the French. Whether to choose monarchism or democracy was another problem which was to be resolved after independence was restored." (*Ngục Trung Thu*, pp.41-42) According to those words, we could consider that Phan Bội Châu's first and last aim was to restore independence to his country.
- 39) In the prospectus (1906) of Việt Nam Duy Tân Hội, Phan Bội Châu declared that his aim was "To overthrow the French government, restore Vietnam, and build a country of constitutional monarchy." (*Tự Phán*, p.63) The prospectus (1912) of Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội said that its aim should be "To drive out the French robbers, restore Vietnam, and build the Vietnamese Republic of democracy." (*ibid.*, p.147) In both, Phan Bội Châu insisted two points at first; driving out the French and restoring the independence of Vietnam. Only through these slogans do we come to his ideas concerning political systems. The third portion of his program obviously not as constant as the first two.

cast in the role of weak nation, and hoped to become a great power. They wanted to follow the model of Japan which was becoming stronger and stronger, and they hoped to win Japanese sympathy and aid. They felt that these hopes were realistic, because they thought Japan would agree with their argument in favor of the yellow race's solidarity against the whites.

However their hopes were gradually destroyed during their stay in Japan. The Japanese government valued official relations with France more than the friendship of the Vietnamese nationalists'. So Phan Bội Châu's group was forced to abandon its hope of getting military aid. They were helped unofficially by some Japanese individuals. They had to limit their activities to organizing a movement appealing for Vietnamese youths to come and study with them in Japan.⁴⁰⁾

Japan became a strong country and joined the imperialist powers. Japan had dissociated herself from the Asian world. She was no longer a chief of the yellow race's league against the whites, but on the contrary conspired with England, Russia and even France. Japan did this in order to suppress the nationalists of weak Asia, and finally she annexed Korea. For Japan, the solidarity of the yellow race could be a useful own slogan, only as long as she could take advantage of it for her aims.

As mentioned above, Phan Bội Châu had an ulterior motive for the conception of power politics which lay behind his advocacy of the solidarity of the yellow race. He believed that Japan was an enemy of Russia, which was an allied country with France. He thought that this would automatically make Japan an enemy of France. But ironically enough, Japan established friendly relations with Russia and even France, after the Russo-Japanese War. The realities of international power politics were far removed from Phan Bội Châu's optimistic expectations and naive conceptions.

In 1908, one year after the Franco-Japanese Treaty, the Japanese government dissolved the Vietnamese students' organization and expelled its two leaders, Phan Bội Châu and Cường Để.⁴¹⁾

Thus the hopes of Phan Bội Châu and his comrades were rejected in the end by Japan. It is very probable that they felt they were betrayed by Japan, and in the end they realized that they had no choice but to cooperate with the weak nations, who were "of the same sickness" as themselves.⁴²⁾

In his last days in Japan, Phan Bội Châu energetically tried to establish close

40) This movement was called the Đông Du movement.

41) Phan Bội Châu, *Tự Phán*, pp. 106, 124, 128. Shinjiro Nagaoka, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-264, 267-268.

42) Phan Bội Châu expressed his ideas about this problem in *Tự Phán*, p. 124. "In this world of power politics, any organization of justice and rightness can not be permitted by the imperialists." He also wrote in *ibid.*, p. 120, "In the 10th month of 1908 (according to the lunar calendar), we dissolved our organization of students, and Công Hiến Hội was completely dead. I realized that we could not rely upon Japan any more. I pinned my hopes on the realization of a Chinese revolution and on the peoples of the same sickness as us."

relations with the nationalists from the weak Asian countries. For example, he was very active in organizing Toa Domei Kai (東亜同盟会) (1908), which aimed at “organizing all the patriots in Asia, all the peoples who have lost their countries, into one party and waiting for the time of simultaneous revolution.”⁴³⁾

A little later, he also became one of the founders of *Điền Quê Việt Liên Minh Hội* (滇桂越連盟会), the co-operative organization of students from three regions, Yunnan, Kwangsi and Vietnam.⁴⁴⁾

Phan Bội Châu and his comrades, who had oriented themselves to Japan, had finally lost all hope for Japanese aid. This is due to the following reasons: (1) they did not realize that Japan was merely a young imperialist country which was going to separate itself from the Asian world, (2) their vision was too naïve to cope with manipulative, huge and capricious power politics, and (3) they were deeply dependent on foreign aid.

V Conclusion

After his disappointment with Japan:

(a) He gave up or altered his argument based on Social Darwinism. He became oriented towards solidarity among the weak, i. e. among the Asian peoples “of the same sickness.”

(b) Although betrayed by Japan, Phan Bội Châu did not abandon the idea of persistence for foreign aid, because he was still a believer in armed resistance. After the Chinese Revolution in 1911, he organized *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* (越南光復会) in Canton, which possessed its own army and provisional government, and at the same time he founded *Chân Hoa Hưng Á Hội* (振華興亞会, Society of Encouraging China and Reviving Asia), in order to get Chinese financial aid. Their army, *Việt Nam Quang Phục Quân* (越南光復軍), was based in China and supported by the Chinese. It was supposed to rush into the territory of Vietnam across the border.⁴⁵⁾

(c) He continued to shift his opinions in accordance with the dictates of self-interest. He quickly adjusted his slogans and superficially held opinion whenever he felt the situation called for it. For example, it was relatively easy for him to convert from constitutional monarchism to republican democracy when he felt it was required by his ultimate goal; freedom and independence for his country.

Although he was deeply influenced by the books and opinions of the Japanese, he was still a disciple of Chinese nationalists and Chinese writers, first of K'ang Yu Wei and Liang Ch'i Cha'o, then of Chang Ping Ling and Sun Wen. His conversion from

43) *Tự Phán*, pp. 120–123.

44) *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 123, 124.

45) *Tự Phán*, pp. 147–165. *Ngục Trung Thư*, pp. 43, 46, 67–68.

monarchism to republicanism coincided with the change of his model. First he admired K'ang and Liang, who took Japan as their ideal model. And later, he shifted his attention to Chang and Sun who had become disappointed with Japan and sought their own way.⁴⁶⁾

But after Phan Bội Châu's disappointment with Japan, some of his comrades still had some hope for Japanese aid. Phan Bội Châu instead turned his attention to China. It was Cường Để who remained involved in the Pan-Asianism of Japan whether willingly or not. Thirty years later, Cường Để was betrayed by Japan for a second time.⁴⁷⁾

46) In reading Phan Bội Châu's autobiography, *Tự Phán*, one can see that he did not mention Liang Ch'i Ch'ao again after describing the incidents of 1907. Instead Phan Bội Châu often mentioned the names of Chinese revolutionaries in the part of the book which dealt with activities of his later years in Japan.

Incidentally, the Chinese who came to Japan in order to seek "new knowledge" or get Japan's help, were also disappointed by the reactions of the Japanese. Thus the pro-Japanese feelings of the Chinese at the time of the Russo-Japanese War gradually changed to antipathy toward Japan. For example, see Shinkichi Eto, *Kindai Chugoku Seiji-shi Kenkyu*, (*On the Modern Political History of China*, Univ. of Tokyo, 1968), pp. 256-257.

47) See, Kiyoshi Komatsu, *Vietnam*, (Shincho-sha, Tokyo, 1955); Cường Để, *Cục Đờì Cách Mạng Cườ'ng Để*, (Saigon, 1957); Hồng Chương, "Cườ'ng Để, Anh Hùng Cứu Nướ'c hay Việt Gian Bán Nướ'c?" *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử*, no. 43.